Minutes of the Cross-Party Group on Digital Participation @ The Scottish Parliament
30 November 2016

Attendees:

- Willie Coffey MSP
- Liam McArthur MSP
- Jamie Green MSP
- Jonathan Ruff (Ofcom)
- Catriona Craig (Ofcom)
- David Walls (Lothian Broadband Networks)
- Nic McCormick (Lothian Broadband Networks)
- Steven Hunt (Scottish Futures Trust)
- Bridget Stevens (Tap-Into-IT)
- Mike Ellis (Tap-Into-IT)
- David McNeil (SCVO)
- Domnhall Dods (UKCTA)
- Diane Webb (Renfrewshire Council)
- David Amos (Renfrewshire Council)
- Alan McNiven (Engage Third Sector Interface Renfrewshire)
- Gina Wilson (Carnegie Trust UK)
- Colin Fosket (Blackwood Group)
- Marie Dougan (Individual)
- Laura Dougan (Individual)
- Mairi Macleod (Communications Consumer Panel)
- Adrienne Chalmers (Individual)
- Mike MacGregor (Individual)
- Ian McCracken (Govan High School)
- Melvyn Ingleson (MJI Business Solutions)
- John Crawford (Independent Libraries Professional)
- Tara Morrsion (Lecturer Business and Computing)
- Evelyn McDowall (Wheatley Group)
- Mark Dames (BT)
- Michael Fourman (Professor Edinburgh University)

Agenda:

1. Opening remarks and Introductions (Wille Coffey MSP)
2. Lothian Broadband Networks (Nic McMormick and David Walls)
3. Digital Renfrewshire Update (Diane Webb)
4. Tap-Into-IT (Bridget Stevens and Mike Ellis)
5. AOB

1. **Opening remarks and introductions (Willie Coffey MSP)**

   1.1. WC welcomed those attending and explained that the group was successfully re-registered with the Scottish Parliament last month. WC advised this was the first meeting since Vicki Nash left her position as Ofcom Scotland Director in October.

   1.2. WC also noted some recent developments that had taken place in the telecommunications sector since the last meeting of the CPG; including the Autumn

statement announcement on broadband funding, the Ofcom Draft Annual Plan for 17/18 and the Broadband Working Group report of the Scottish Rural Parliament.

2. **Lothian Broadband Networks (Nic McMormick and David Walls)**

   2.1. Nic McCormick (Managing Director) and David Walls (Director) provided us with a short presentation on the organisation's role in delivering superfast broadband to communities, individuals and businesses in East Lothian. It focused on some of the different technologies being used to deliver broadband services in hard to reach areas.

   2.2. NM provided CPG members with short history of the organisation and explained how it uses "line of sight" fixed wireless technology to deliver broadband services in areas not currently covered by the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband rollout programme.

   2.3. NM described the Humbie Net Community Broadband Scotland project which has connected 87 houses to date. NM explained that this was delivering wider economic benefits to the area. NM explained that consumers could now achieve superfast download speeds where it had not been previously possible. NM said he supported adopting an "outside-in" approach to rolling out infrastructure; this would see rural premises being catered for first ahead of more densely populated urban areas. NM also outlined some of the difficulties they have had to overcome, including access to backhaul, skills shortage and overcoming state aid rules.

   2.4. During questions/discussion, the following points were raised:

   - CPG members were interested to know more about the "outside-in" approach to regulation. NM said that they had been able to benefit from 'white areas' but that the fibre tax had been prohibitive.

   - CPG members also asked about the BDUK voucher system and why there was such low awareness of it amongst consumers. NM explained that both UK and Scottish Governments could be doing more to promote the Better Broadband Scheme.

   - CPG members agreed that solutions needed to be future-proofed so that we did not end up discussing the same issues in ten years' time.

   - CPG members agreed that such wireless schemes could have significant impact on rural communities. MSPs present encouraged CPG members to participate fully in the work of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee.

3. **Digital Renfrewshire (Diane Webb)**

   3.1. Diane Webb (Digital Assistance team) provided us with a short update on Renfrewshire Council's digital strategy – which aims to tackle digital exclusion in Renfrewshire.

3.2. DW encouraged CPG members to participate in wider online discussions using #DigiREN. DW explained that she was seeking to raise awareness of the digital divide by bringing together interested groups and stakeholders. DW explained the importance of having digital skills today.

3.3. DW explained that Renfrewshire has a 'high' likelihood of digital exclusion. The Digital Renfrewshire programme therefore set out a vision and approach to tackling digital exclusion the area. It is supported by an action plan that will be refreshed on an annual basis to reflect the fast- growing digital society we find ourselves in. The Digital Strategy has been developed in response to The Tackling Poverty Strategy and The Renfrewshire Digital Participation Plan (2016). The Digital Participation Plan recommended the need for an overarching Digital Strategy to coordinate existing activities, share resources and work in partnership towards a shared vision. DW also noted the significant overlap with the Scottish Government's own objectives.

3.4. During questions/discussion, the following points were raised:

- CPG members asked whether the team had considered the role of public libraries and 'digital champions' in tackling digital exclusion.

- CPG members agreed that a strong social media presence helped generate interest in the community and drive forward the work of the programme.

- CPG members commented on the inspiring vision that had been set out by DW, noting this model should be adopted by other local authorities.

4. **Tap-Into-IT (Bridget Stevens and Mike Ellis)**

4.1. ME introduced CPG members to the work of his organisation "Tap-Into-IT" which is an Edinburgh-based social enterprise company aiming to help everyone (particularly older people) get online.

4.2. ME outlined some of the key features of his organisations work which included one to one support, digital skills training clubs, the 'Rekindle & Reconnect' programme, 'Accessibility' training and the 'Shopper' service.

4.3. ME explained that Tap-Into-IT was partly self-funded but also received funding and grants from Viewpoint HA, CGI SCNP, Digital Challenge Fund and received other support from stakeholders including John Lewis and Scotmid. He also explained that the 'Accessibility training' was delivered in partnership with RNIB and South Central Neighbourhood Partnership.

4.4. ME explained noted some of the challenges which included, ensuring broadband access for low income consumers, reaching those who did not want to engage/felt isolated as well as providing functional technology/equipment for home users.

4.5. ME explained that the procurement process was overly complicated and it could often be difficult to secure funds from national and local government. ME asked MSPs/MPs to assist with funding applications wherever it was appropriate.

4.6. ME also asked CPG members to provide input and offer their shared expertise to aid the ongoing work of the organisation.

4.7. During questions/discussion, the following points were raised:

- Some CPG members noted that that VAT charges no longer applied to sales of certain computer equipment for people who experienced difficulties with their sight.

- Some CPG members asked whether the organisation had explored working with other local authorities such as Edinburgh Council. ME advised this was an ongoing process.

5. **AOB**

5.1. WC thanked members for their time and suggested that anyone who had an interest in presenting at a future CPG meeting contact Jonathan Ruff from Ofcom directly.